



UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

*United States Attorney Donald W. Washington
Western District of Louisiana*

United States Courthouse • 300 Fannin Street, Suite 3201 • Shreveport, Louisiana 71101-3068 • (318) 676-3600
United States Courthouse • 800 Lafayette Street, Suite 2200 • Lafayette, Louisiana 70501-7206 • (337) 262-6618

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Contact: Donald W. Washington (337-262-6618)

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William J. Flanagan (318-676-3600)

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FERRIDAY WOMAN SENTENCED FOR FEMA FRAUD

Charged with fraudulently obtaining FEMA relief funds

Shreveport, Louisiana . . . A woman who befriended an evacuee at one of the rescue shelters following Hurricane Katrina and then stole her FEMA fraud disaster assistance checks, was sentenced today in U.S. District Court in Alexandria, Louisiana, United States Attorney Donald W. Washington announced. **DEBBIE ANDERSON**, age 37, of Ferriday, Louisiana, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Dee D. Drell to spend 3 months in prison and was ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$4,358. ANDERSON was also ordered to pay a fine in the amount of \$1,000.

ANDERSON pled guilty in January to conspiracy to use federal disaster funds for her own personal use. Testimony at the guilty plea hearing revealed that ANDERSON met an evacuee at a rescue shelter following Hurricane Katrina and gave that individual permission to use ANDERSON's address to receive their mail. When an express mail package arrived at ANDERSON's residence addressed to the evacuee, ANDERSON signed for the mail with a fictitious name and opened the mail, which contained two FEMA disaster assistance checks which were intended for the evacuee. ANDERSON took the checks and went to a local car dealership and

persuaded the salesman to allow her to use one of the checks to purchase a car. ANDERSON took the other check to a bank in Jonesville, Louisiana and persuaded the teller to cash the check for her because she had no identification. The total amount of the checks was \$4,358.

Sentencing in federal court is determined by the discretion of federal judges and the governing statute. United States Sentencing Guidelines established by the United States Congress and the United States Sentencing Commission are only used as guidelines by the judge in determining the appropriate sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Alexander C. Van Hook and was a joint investigation by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Alexandria Resident Agency.

To date, the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of Louisiana has charged 22 defendants with violations related to FEMA relief funds, and more than 100 FEMA fraud investigations are on-going in the Western District of Louisiana.

In September 2005, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales created the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, designed to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud, identity theft, procurement fraud and insurance fraud. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force - chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division - includes members from the FBI, the Federal Trade Commission, the Postal Inspector's Office, and the Executive Office for United States Attorneys, among others.

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